EXTRACT FROM GEORGE ORWELL, POLITICS & THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (1946)

But if thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought. A bad usage can spread by tradition and imitation even among people who should and do know better.   The debased language that I have been discussing is in some ways very convenient. phrases like "a not unjustifiable assumption", "leaves much to be desired", "would serve no good purpose", "a consideration which we should do well to bear in mind" are a continuous temptation, a packet of aspirins always at one's elbow. Look back through this essay, and for certain you will find that I have again and again committed the very faults I am protesting against. By this morning's post I have received a pamphlet dealing with conditions in germany. The author tells me that he "felt impelled" to write it. I open it at random, and here

is almost the first sentence I see: "[The Allies] have an opportunity not only of achieving a radical transformation of GERMANY's social and political structure in such a way as to avoid a nationalistic reaction in Germany itself, but at the same time of laying the foundations of a cooperative and unified Europe." You see, he "feels impelled" to write feels, presumably, that he has something new to say and yet his words, like cavalry horses answering the bugle, group themselves automatically into the familiar dreary pattern. This invasion of one's mind by ready-made phrases (lay the foundations, "achieve a radical transformation") can only be prevented if one is constantly on guard against them, and every such phrase anaesthetizes a portion of one's brain. I said earlier that the decadence of our language is probably curable. Those who deny this would argue if they produced an argument at all, that language merely reflects existing social conditions, and that we cannot influence its development by any direct tinkring with words and constructions So far as the general tone or spirit of a language goes, this may be true, but it is not true in detail. Silly words and expresions have often disappeared, not through any evolutionary process (but) owing to the conscious action of a minority. 2 recent examples were "explore every avenue" and "leave no stone unturned", which were killed by the jeers of a few journalists. There is a long list of fly blown metaphors which could similarly be got rid of if enougz people would interest themselvves in the job; and it should also be possible to laugh the "not un-" formation out of existence, to reduce the amount of latin and greek in the average sentence, to drive out forein phrases and strayed scientific words, and, in general, to make pretentiousnesss unfashionable.

Extract for illustrative purposes only